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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DOCUMENT NO. 64

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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MAY BE DECLASSIFIED SUBJECT TO REVIEWBY: State

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

See para 3.

SUBJECT: Prospects for Syro-Egyptian Reunion

1. Since the breakup of the union between Syria and Egypt in September 1961, the extreme instability which has habitually characterized Syrian political life has, if anything, become even more marked. In the initial excitement, many Syrians welcomed the resumption of independence, but since then the radical elements which favor closer association with Cairo -- important segments of the military, a substantial portion of urban workers, the professional class and the peasantry -- have been increasingly active. Their activity was clearly reflected in the attempt by pro-Nasserist military elements in Aleppo to turn the 28 March 1962 coup toward reunion.

2. However, there are major roadblocks on the path to reunion. The Syrian Army has been much fragmented by constant maneuvering of factions in the past months, but it did engineer the September

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breakaway and probably the greater part of it still favors Syrian independence. Most of the landlord-merchant-conservative politician class remains utterly opposed to Nasser and his socialism. The Christian minority, generally speaking, favors a separate Syria because of its endemic fear of being submerged in a Moslem sea.

3. Internally, the clash of interests between conservative and radical forces, the constant interference of the military in politics, and extreme political factionalism have caused several changes of government and have left Syria with a narrowly-based government which could be turned out at almost any time. The government has proved unable to give a sense of direction or leadership to the country; in consequence practically all aspects of the national life are stagnating. In these circumstances, indications are increasing that Syria's leaders, despite their preference for independence, see a new association with Egypt as the only way out of the impasse. The recent escape of Sarraj, almost certainly connived in by the Syrian regime, was in part at least an earnest of Syrian desires for better relations with Cairo.

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4. Should the Qudsi-Azmah regime be ousted, the reunion issue would probably become even more acute. An avowedly anti-UAR coup would probably produce a strong reaction on the part of pronounists which could bring Syria to virtual civil war. On the other hand, a pronoun coup, say by militant junior officers, would face Nasser with immediate critical decisions. The present Syrian economy is incompatible with Nasser's brand of socialism and any effort to remold it and to centralize political controls would almost certainly lead to renewed charges of "Egyptianization" and the same kind of turmoil which led to the breakup of the union last time. A looser form of union would also have its difficulties, insofar as it would saddle him with the responsibility for an Arab unity movement whose course he did not have the authority to direct.

5. Nevertheless, the mystique of unity is compelling all over the Arab world, and while Nasser is not anxious to regain Syria, he probably could not afford to turn down outright a Syrian bid for reunion. The problem of the precise form of reassociation will probably require long drawn out negotiations. Nasser will almost certainly require Syrian concessions to his socialist program -- the enforcement of which caused the 1961 split -- while the Syrians will probably hold out for a measure of political autonomy. Nevertheless,

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over the long run Nasser has the stronger position, for it is the Syrians who need him to solve their political dilemma. All in all, we believe there is at least an even chance that sooner or later there will be a reassociation of Syria and Egypt although probably on a federal rather than a unitary basis.

6. The implications of such a reassociation are substantial. Nasser would gain significantly in stature, both at home and abroad, and pro-Nasser groups in other Arab states might be emboldened to strike at their own governments. Kings Husayn and Saud would see the reunion of Syria and Egypt as a direct threat to themselves and the former, especially, might be goaded into an attempt to intervene in support of anti-Nasser elements in Syria.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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